

# BRANCHING OUT

Lifting, Empowering, Advocating, and Fighting for survivors, allies, and a culture of consent



## DIRECTOR'S NOTES

by Karen Fetherston



### Highlights from BeLEAF's First Annual Meeting

On August 9, 2021, BeLEAF Survivors held its first Annual Board Meeting to recognize volunteers and donors and to provide updates on agency activities. It was also a wonderful opportunity to celebrate the accomplishments of the past year,

#### 2021 Highlights:

- BeLEAF Survivors officially launched as an independent non-profit agency on July 1, 2021. This auspicious event was a culmination of a year of planning and preparation to obtain the necessary credentials and arrange a firm foundation of support services. This was accomplished while simultaneously providing consistent levels of direct services and support to survivors despite the added administrative responsibilities and obstacles related to Covid-19.
- Fundraising in a normal year is a challenge. Fundraising in the pandemic year added degrees of difficulty. Despite social distancing obstacles, BeLEAF was able to introduce two new, profitable fundraisers this year. Both the Sip & Dip in February and Small Plates Big Hearts in July were unique activities that received very positive feedback from participants. The Fund Development Committee is proud that they were able to plan these events via Zoom and execute them so successfully. They are also thankful for the hard-working and dedicated staff, board members, and volunteers who helped make them possible,

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● Board members and staff celebrated the fact that they were able to come together to complete a Reserve Fund Campaign at warp speed. Between the months of May, June, and July, BeLEAF raised more than \$82,000 of the \$90,000 campaign goal. Funds came from a combination of sources, including the Small Plates Big Hearts fundraiser, foundation and grant funding, and an active community campaign. This campaign saw donations from all sectors of the community with amounts ranging from \$10 to \$10,000. It also was supported by community-led events such as a trivia night hosted by McAuliffe's Pub, cupcakes sales from Hopscotch Cakery, pizza sales at RYOCF, and a walking endurance fundraiser by a very dedicated supporter. (Cont. on page 2)

# HELLO. MY NAME IS...

By Alexxa DeCarlo



Hello everyone! My name is Alexxa DeCarlo, and I am the 2021-2022 intern at BeLEAF Survivors. I am very excited to begin my journey with BeLEAF! I look forward to working with different staff members, growing our platform through social media, and learning about various community resources. Everyone I have met thus far has been extraordinarily welcoming, and I cannot wait to see what the rest of the year will hold!

I will be graduating with a Bachelors's degree in Social Work this upcoming spring from Carthage College. I intend to go to graduate school in the next few years and obtain a Master's degree in Applied Behavior Analysis. I have found great passion in working with vulnerable populations because it allows me the opportunity to give back to my community. Although I did not have a lot of expertise on sexual assault before accepting this position, the mission of BeLEAF Survivors has resonated with me since the first day I interviewed at the agency. I hope while interning at BeLEAF that I can expand my interpersonal skills, make a difference in the life of a survivor and be an adequate resource to the staff.



## SAS Program Statistics

January-June 2021

211 crisis line calls  
32 Racine hospital visits  
2 Burlington hospital visits  
48 legal advocacy sessions  
66 CAC appointments  
468 counseling sessions  
12 group sessions  
7 educational presentations

(Cont. from page 1)

● BeLEAF Survivors is already growing! The Stop Child Abuse & Neglect (SCAN) Program joined BeLEAF on July 1, 2021, the same date as the official launch of BeLEAF Survivors as an independent nonprofit organization. SCAN was reunited with its former Lutheran Social Services "sister program", the Sexual Assault Services (SAS) program. BeLEAF is excited to have both phenomenal programs under one roof and benefit from the relentless commitment of SAS and SCAN staff to our mission and those we serve.

● BeLEAF Survivors is extending its reach into the community. Throughout the last year, the agency has made a concerted effort to increase its digital presence across all social media platforms. BeLEAF has seen increased online traffic and reach with some platforms doubling or even tripling activity. Additionally, BeLEAF launched a Spanish version of the agency Facebook page to address barriers to the Spanish-speaking population. Information about our services and organization is available to a wider audience than ever before.

There were many highs mentioned at the annual meeting, but you can bet there were plenty of challenges in starting BeLEAF Survivors, as well. Leadership trainer Simon Sinek advises, "The hardest part is starting. Once you get that out of the way, you'll find the rest of the journey much easier." As Executive Director, I certainly hope he is right! I would like to thank the BeLEAF Survivors Board members for their dedication and service during their inaugural year. Now that we have had a successful start, let's move on to the rest of the journey.



The Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault (WCASA) and End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin (EDAW) held their biannual Legislative Advocacy Day on March 23, 2021. This year's event was a little different in that it was all held virtually due to the pandemic. On Legislative Advocacy Day, advocates, survivors and other concerned citizens can meet with their representatives to discuss concerns about legislation that may arise during the upcoming legislative session.

This article gives an overview of bills in the Wisconsin Legislature that impact sexual assault survivors. If you would like more detailed information on this legislation or on the legislative process, please contact Vicki Biehn at 262-619-1634 or [vbiehn@beleafsurvivors.org](mailto:vbiehn@beleafsurvivors.org) or Ian Henderson from the Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault at [ianh@wcasa.org](mailto:ianh@wcasa.org).

## **Sexual Assault Kit (SAK) Collection and Processing AB 67/SB 71**

The state of Wisconsin previously had over 6000 SAKs that were not submitted to a crime lab for testing. This bill will ensure that Wisconsin does not experience another backlog of unsubmitted SAKs in the future by creating specific timeframes during which law enforcement must collect a kit and send the kit to the crime lab for processing. This bill restores some power to survivors by providing them with clear options and expectations regarding their health care, the collection of forensic evidence, and reporting to law enforcement.

## **Virtual Legislative Advocacy Day 2021**

**Tuesday, March 23 | 9:30 - 11:00am**  
learn. advocate. impact.



## **Sexual Assault Kit Tracking System AB 87/SB 95**

This bill will provide survivors the ability to anonymously track the location and status of their SAK throughout the justice system process. Currently 29 states (including all of our neighboring states) and the District of Columbia already have this tracking system in place. This would put Wisconsin in line with many other states and empower survivors which is one of the first steps towards healing from the trauma. At this point the Wisconsin Senate has passed both of these bills. Now the bills need to go to the Assembly Criminal Justice Committee for a hearing, pass the committee, and then go to the floor of the Assembly for a full Assembly vote.

## **Sexual Assault by Law Enforcement Officer AB 127/SB 199**

Currently correctional staff members are prohibited from any sexual contact with a person who is confined in a correctional facility. Consent is not an issue, because the statutes recognize the imbalance of power between correctional staff members and inmates. This means that actual consent to sexual contact is not possible in these situations. This bill will close an existing gap in Wisconsin sexual assault laws by making it a crime for a law enforcement officer to have sexual contact with a person in their custody because consent is not possible in these situations, too. Currently there is bipartisan support for this bill and the senate has held a public hearing in the Judicial Committee.

## **Terminating a Tenancy for Fear of Imminent Violence AB 58/SB 67**

This bill allows survivors to terminate their tenancy if they or their children fear imminent violence and face an imminent threat of serious physical harm if they remain on the premises. This bill addresses limitations in current law for sexual assault victims by allowing a different requirement to terminate the lease, a written statement from a victim advocate who has a reasonable basis to believe that the tenant is a victim of sexual assault. Currently, a survivor can only terminate a lease by providing their landlord a copy of an injunction against the perpetrator or a copy of a criminal complaint alleging that they are a victim of sexual assault. Unfortunately, most sexual assault victims do not report their assault and even fewer offenders are arrested or prosecuted. This requirement made it impossible for many survivors to terminate their leases and therefore they had to continue to live in fear of their offenders. Currently this bill has had the committee hearings in both houses, needs to be voted on the floor by the Senate and passed out of the committee from the Assembly and then voted on by the Assembly.

## **Safe Harbor Bill LRB-2164**

This bill would remove the ability to charge a sex-trafficked child with prostitution. We should not arrest and charge child sex trafficking victims when they are too young to consent to sex. This bill would bring Wisconsin state law in line with the federal Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA). Currently this bill has bipartisan support and is circulating for co-sponsorships in both the Senate and Assembly.



This past July, Sexual Assault Services (SAS) was excited and grateful to be awarded funding through the United Way of Racine County to provide LIFT (Link and Inspire for Tomorrow) programming at Racine's newest community school, Mitchell. For those unfamiliar with LIFT or community school models, United Way's website summarizes these concepts nicely:



*LIFT is a place-based strategy that creates partnerships between neighborhoods and resources. It connects families from LIFT sites and the surrounding neighborhoods with resources focused on academics, family relationships, and health and social services. Community schools increase opportunities for children to succeed in school by adding the kinds of resources known to make a difference: increased parental involvement in children's education; extra learning opportunities through educational enrichment; consistent access to adult guidance and support; and ready access to physical, dental and mental health services. For more information about LIFT, visit: <https://www.unitedwayracine.org/lift>*

SAS will be offering a number of services to the Mitchell community this school year.

- Individual Therapy – SAS's Bilingual Therapist will provide counseling sessions in English and/or Spanish to Mitchell students who have experienced sexual abuse. She will provide these sessions at the school during the school day in order to reduce barriers for families who might not be able to come to the SAS office for services. She plans to have two Mitchell students on her client list at any given time, with the goal of seeing four to six students during the school year (depending on individual length of treatment). SAS hopes to begin providing this service as soon as possible now that school is in session.
- Support Group – SAS's Rural Services Coordinator & Therapist and SAS's Volunteer & Community Awareness Specialist will facilitate a support group for middle school-aged female survivors of sexual abuse. This group will be offered in English only and will incorporate activities, discussions, and art projects to build relationships between participants and facilitate healing. The group will occur at the school but will be held on Monday evenings and last about 10 weeks.
- Educational Group – SAS staff was recently trained in facilitation of the My Life My Choice curriculum and intends to offer this group to Mitchell students in the spring of 2022. My Life My Choice was designed for female-identifying adolescents who are identified as survivors of or at-risk for human trafficking and provides them with safety net of proven solutions, grounded in evidence, to protect them from predators and exploitation. This group will also be offered outside of school hours and in English only. Visit <https://mylifemychoice.org/> for more information about this effort.
- Educational Sessions – SAS will offer brief educational presentations, aimed at parents and other caregivers, that will be centered around prevention of sexual abuse, warning signs of sexual abuse, and being a good support person for a child who has experienced sexual abuse. These sessions will be offered in the evening at the school and can be provided in both English and Spanish.

SAS is thrilled to be partnering with Mitchell and United Way to bring these needed services to the school community. LIFT programming has had a remarkable impact on Racine's other community schools, Knapp and Julian Thomas, and SAS is honored to be a part of making a positive impact on Mitchell, as well. We look forward to an amazing school year full of education, support, and collaboration.

## VOLUNTEER Q & A ???

by Scarlette Kinderman



### **Tell us a little bit about yourself, Carol.**

*I was raised by my mother and my stepfather. There were six of us kids, so a total of eight in the family, and with our dog Apollo that made nine. I have three beautiful children of my own and raised them as a single mom, one of my biggest accomplishments. They're all grown now. I have, oh my gosh, ten beautiful grandchildren, two are in heaven, and one beautiful great granddaughter. I'm originally from Chicago and then we moved to Arizona in 1970. I've lived in CA, CO, and AL. I landed in Racine in June 2017, and I'm glad I did because it has changed my life. I've made some wonderful connections in the community and being here saved my life.*

### **How did you hear about the Sexual Assault Services (SAS) program of BeLEAF Survivors, Inc?**

*Well, I was just visiting with Curt (20+ year volunteer advocate with BeLEAF) at an event hosted by the Hospitality Center. I had met him through my journey of networking and trying to find my way in Racine. Curt always treated me like he had known me forever! I told Curt I was having trouble finding my way in Racine and he told me about his experience as a volunteer at SAS and that volunteers were always needed. He said to reach out to SAS if it was something I'd like to do.*

### **What made you feel that volunteering with BeLEAF Survivors was the right choice for you?**

*I wanted to be the voice and advocate for my niece, Tia, and my daughter, Jodie, who had been sexually abused by my sister's ex-husband when they were toddlers. It would happen when Jodie would spend the night with Tia. He continued to sexually abuse my niece until she was 16 years old. That is when the family found out. It's just a very sad story. They kept it a secret for many years as they endured this pain and trauma. I don't know how it happened, but Tia was encouraged by a good friend of hers to tell the police, and she did. To this day, my daughter has not spoken about it. I just know, as her mother, it has affected her. My niece just turned 40 and I have watched how it has deeply affected her entire being and it probably always will. Tia and Jodie are beautiful, resilient women and mothers. I know I cannot change what happened to Tia and Jodie but I can be there to support and comfort survivors in ways I could not for my niece and daughter.*

### **What do you hope to gain from volunteering and working with BeLEAF Survivors long-term?**

*Long term, the education, learning, and growing pieces that will help me to be the best I can be in supporting BeLEAF Survivors and the lives of survivors. As a volunteer, not only will I be there for others in our community that have experienced sexual abuse, but I will also be there for my niece and daughter in the silence of my heart. The love for my family and passion for helping others give me purpose and keep me moving forward in life!*

### **You've volunteered with BeLEAF Survivors for a few months. What has that experience been like for you?**

*Well, it's been wonderful! I found an old email that I sent, I think it was March 2019, to SAS asking about the volunteer program and upcoming trainings. I tried many times to make it through the in-person training and finally this past year was able to complete the virtual training. The training was very valuable! I especially, appreciated the staff and volunteers' input and shared experiences. This has helped me to be calm and not worry about how I would handle phone calls or hospital visits. I have volunteered 3 shifts now and it has been very rewarding, to say the least.*

### **We are so grateful you wanted to join our organization. Do you have anything else you would like to add?**

*Thank you to all the volunteers that have been here and the new ones that are up and coming. I am spreading the word and providing resources to my support systems and connections I have made in the community. Many are unaware that Sexual Assault Services is now BeLEAF Survivors. So, I think the more we can educate and provide the information and resources, the more people we can reach. I think you are all amazing and I am very grateful for all of you. I'm honored to be a volunteer here! I so appreciate the recordings of the continued education courses that Scarlette (Volunteer and Community Awareness Specialist) makes available to us. Hopefully in the future, I will be able to attend the volunteer activities. I think it is important that we all gather from time to time and offer support to each other. I have said enough.*

*Thank you. Thank you. Thank you!*





# ROMPIENDO BARRERAS

by Annabell Bustillos



As the Bilingual Outreach Advocate, I work with Racine's large Spanish speaking community and the Hispanic community as a whole. The United States has a large Hispanic/ Latino population. According to Pew Research Center, the U.S. Hispanic population reached 60.6 million in 2019, and Hispanic Americans are

the nation's second-fastest-growing racial or ethnic group after Asian Americans.

According to "The Sexual Assault Among Latinas Survey," a 2010 study conducted by Carlos A. Cuevas, Ph.D. and Chiara Sabina, Ph.D., one in six Latinas experience sexual victimization in their lifetime. Therefore, I feel it is important to increase our awareness about the Hispanic community. September 15th marks the first day of Hispanic Heritage Month, I would like to share some background and history about Hispanic Heritage Month in this issue of "Rompiendo Barreras."

So, what is Hispanic Heritage Month and how did it come to be? Americans celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month every year from September 15th to October 15th. During these dates we recognize the contributions and influence of Hispanic Americans to the history, culture, and achievements of the U.S. and celebrate American citizens whose ancestors came from Spain, Mexico, the Caribbean, Central America, and South America.

Hispanic Heritage Month started as a week-long celebration when it was originally introduced in June of 1968 by U.S. Congressman George E. Brown. But honestly, is a week enough to celebrate the Hispanic community? I don't think so. So, in 1987, U.S. Rep Esteban E. Torres proposed expanding the week to a month. This first bill died in committee, but an amended version was later introduced in 1988 by Senator Paul Simon that successfully passed congress. President Ronald Reagan signed the bill into law on August 17, 1988. Since then, Hispanic Heritage Month has been celebrated each year from September 15th to October 15th.



But why does the celebration start in the middle of the month? Well, because a handful of Latin American countries' Independence Days align during the week of September 15th. It makes it a perfect time to kick off a month of celebrations.

## Latin American Independence Days

September 15th:  
Costa Rica, El Salvador,  
Guatemala, Honduras,  
Nicaragua

September 16th: Mexico

September 18th: Chile

September 21st: Belize



What can we do during Hispanic Heritage Month or throughout the year to help widen knowledge and understanding of the Hispanic community? Well, you can read books by authors of Hispanic origin, watch movies about Hispanic culture, support local Hispanic businesses and try new food, or go to local events, either virtual or in person, that celebrate Hispanic culture.

(Adapted from) Women's Health -15 Facts About National Hispanic Heritage Month You Should Know In 2021

<https://www.womenshealthmag.com/life/a37168158/hispanic-heritage-month-facts/> "The Sexual Assault Among Latinas Survey,"

# WISCONSIN CLERGY & FAITH LEADER ABUSE INITIATIVE

by Christa Dasher



On April 27th of this year, Wisconsin's Attorney General, Josh Kaul, announced a statewide initiative, led by the Wisconsin Department of Justice (DOJ), which is investigating reports of clergy and faith leader abuse in Wisconsin.

According to the law firm Manly, Stewart & Finaldi, clergy and faith leader abuse is the sexual assault, harm and/or exploitation of a member of a congregation by a member of the clergy or another faith leader. There are few statistics on clergy abuse, as many victims never come forward to report. Clergy and faith leader abuse is most commonly thought of in the context of the Catholic church, however there are cases that have been reported in other faith communities including faiths such as Muslim and Jewish religions.

The primary goal of the initiative is to provide an independent and thorough review of the sexual abuse by clergy and faith leaders, regardless of when the abuse took place. Previously, most reports of abuse were investigated under a church's own review, or church to church. This has led to many reports being dismissed. Subsequently, survivors are not being believed and, ultimately, being re-traumatized.

Through this initiative, the Wisconsin DOJ provides a safe and confidential place for survivors to report past and present abuse and provides them with validation and referral to support resources. In addition to survivors, others who have witnessed, know about, or suspect abuse are encouraged to report what they know and anything they may know about the church's response to the abuse. The victim can be an adult or minor, and parents can report on behalf of their minor child. Reports can be made either by calling a toll-free number at the DOJ or by using an online reporting tool. Reports can be made anonymously, and the survivor can share as little or as much as they would like. All reports will remain confidential with the DOJ. Reports can be of any abuse type and made from any religious organization or faith in Wisconsin. There are no time limitations and no requirement the abuser still be alive.

You may wonder, what happens after a report has been made? Actions will not be taken without the consent of the survivor or reporting person. If a person has shared their contact information, a victim services specialist will reach out to them and gather additional information and provide support and resources to the survivor. The information provided by the reporter will be collected and compiled with information received by the DOJ from other sources, such as documents provided by the church. If the survivor consents, each case will be reviewed by a multi-disciplinary team that includes a prosecutor, law enforcement investigator, and a victim advocate. Cases that are within the statute of limitations are referred to local law enforcement, with the consent of the survivor. Any published lists of credibly accused clergy can be verified for completeness.

Since the start of the initiative, the Wisconsin DOJ has received over 100 reports of abuse by clergy as well as non-clergy, some of which occurred outside the state of Wisconsin. These reports have included sexual abuse, as well as other forms of abuse. Reports have been received regarding all five Catholic dioceses in Wisconsin, as well as from other religious denominations. They have also taken reports that have not been related to any religious organization. The investigation is still ongoing and Wisconsin Attorney General Kaul is encouraging those who are survivors, or have any information regarding clergy abuse, to continue to come forward.

*Survivors of clergy or faith leader abuse, their friends and family, or anyone who has information about how a religious organization has responded to reported abuse are encouraged to report that information to DOJ:*

**1-877-222-2620**

**7:45-4:30 M-F**

[SupportSurvivors.widj.gov](https://SupportSurvivors.widj.gov)





## RIDE SHARE

by Kari Wilder



Up until the 1980s, hitchhiking was common practice. After World War II, cars, gasoline, and even tires were not easily accessible, so it became standard behavior to request rides from strangers. As car ownership rose in the 1960s, hitchhiking decreased among certain populations in the United States, but it was still normal practice for others. It was especially common amongst hippies. Hitchhikers were no longer men down on their luck looking for employment after a war. Instead, it was now often young men and women looking to catch a quick ride home, have a good time with friends, or explore the country. While hitchhiking was never the safest practice it became even more dangerous with this shift.

These young men and women were extremely vulnerable to crimes such as robbery and sexual assault. Articles written in the 1960s and 1970s discuss the high rates of sexual assault among female hitchhikers with police often acknowledging that for every rape they knew about there were ten that were never reported. Hitchhikers also became easy targets to serial killers who used the highways to find victims and hide their crimes. By the late 1970s, the conversation around hitchhiking changed from describing it as a convenient and fun mode of transportation to something scary, dangerous, and reckless. Children born after this change were often told that getting in a stranger's car was one of the most dangerous things they could do. They were repeatedly reminded of risks not only by their families but also by Hollywood which made movies like "Diary of a Teenage Hitchhiker" featuring a teenage girl trying to escape a sexual predator targeting hitchhikers.

Flash forward to 2021 and it is now common practice for individuals to use rideshare apps such as Uber and Lyft. We now willingly pay for a ride from a stranger. For many individuals in larger cities Uber and Lyft are their primary means of transportation.

In just two years of data, 2017-2019, Uber reported receiving almost 6,000 sexual assault claims which ranged from unwanted touching and kissing to rape. These are just the sexual assaults that were reported. Often individuals are intoxicated when using Uber and Lyft which makes them even more vulnerable to sexual assault and unfortunately less likely to remember if a sexual assault occurred.

The extent of background checks of Uber drivers also varies from state to state which can allow certain crimes and reports to slip through the cracks. Not to mention the possibility of someone driving an Uber or Lyft while using someone else's account. Reports show that drivers will end the ride early so that according to app the ride was completed successfully and then continue driving their potential victim to another location.



In July of this year, Nathaniel Rowland was sentenced to life in prison for the abduction and murder of Samantha Josephson, a 21-year-old college student, who mistook his car for her Uber in 2019. Josephson was stabbed a total of 120 times by Rowland. Her death and the mass media coverage urged rideshare apps to implement new security measures. Uber launched the Campus Safety Initiative. Now Uber provides riders with the picture of the driver, make and model of their vehicle, and their license plate not once but three times before the car arrives. It urges riders to verify that the vehicle is in fact the car they requested. It also allows riders to opt to receive a pin they can share with the driver to verify their ride. (Cont. on page 9)



(Cont. from page 8)

Uber and Lyft are also working to provide signs in well-lit areas where riders can safely wait for their cars. These areas are common on college campuses and airports. After a rider is in the vehicle, Uber also provides a “Safety Toolkit”. This part of the app gives the option of using “share my ride” which allows up to five trusted friends or family members to watch the ride in real time. It also has a 911 Assistance option which calls 911 and in some cities the car’s make and model, license plate, and GPS location are made available to 911 dispatchers.

There are also third-party apps that can provide riders with an additional layer of security, especially in cities where all stages of the “Safety Toolkit” have not been implemented or in situations where calling 911 is too difficult or impossible. One app is Circle of 6 which allows users to add up to six contacts who will receive pre-programmed text messages when an icon is pressed in the app. Pressing the pin icon sends a text with the user’s GPS coordinates and requests help getting home safely. The phone icon sends a text asking for a phone call to help them leave a dangerous or uncomfortable situation. Pressing the chat icon lets their contacts know they need to talk. Another option is Life 360. While this app is marketed towards families, it does give users real-time access to the location of others in the same group. By using the “Help Alert” option in the app these same members will instantly receive the location of the user in need. A third option is LifeLine Response which, unfortunately, is not free. They do however offer 14 free days of services. The cost of the subscription is based on the duration of the subscription and the number of people on the account. This app allows users to press and hold their thumb on the screen when the app is open, and the moment the user’s thumb leaves the screen a disarm code will appear. If the app is unable to be unlocked a loud alarm will be set off and authorities will be sent to the location.

While rideshare apps are essentially hitchhiking 2.0 with some of the same risks and dangers, technology allows us to do a better job at keeping ourselves safe. Knowledge of and use of these tools is essential especially for many Americans in larger cities where rideshare apps are their primary mode of transportation. Knowing how they can keep themselves safe and report unsafe drivers can help save someone’s life.



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**24 Hour Crisis Line:**  
**262-637-SAFE (7233)**

**Spanish Warm Line: 262-424-3134**  
**(M-F 8a-5p)**



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